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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/AGS - VIKMANIS-KELLER

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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE TO AUSTRIA -- MARCH 20 EU FOREIGN
MINISTERS MEETING (GAERC)

REF: STATE 39905

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Gregory E. Phillips. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (SBU) EconPolCouns delivered reftel demarche on March 14 to Austrian MFA European Correspondent Andreas Riecken. Riecken made the following substantive comments

2. (C) MEPP -- In light of the day's developments in Gaza, there might be more discussion of the situation in the Middle East. This remained unclear, however. At lunch, Austria will present a briefing on the visits of Egyptian President Mubarak and Palestinian Authority President Abbas to Vienna.

3. (C) Western Balkans -- there will be Council conclusions as a follow-up to the March 10-11 Gymnich discussions in Salzburg. However, Riecken said he did not foresee a lengthy discussion, since the issue just received full treatment in Salzburg. On Montenegro, Riecken expressed some skepticism on whether it would be possible to avoid difficulties if the referendum resulted in a vote which approached 55 percent, but did not reach that level.

4. (C) Iran -- Riecken said there would be Council conclusions on Iran, although there would not be a long discussion of the issue. The conclusions would have two parts -- the first would address the nuclear issue, while the second would discuss the human rights dialogue. Riecken said there was pressure in the EU to demonstrate that there was more content to the EU view of Iran than just the nuclear issue. The human rights dialogue had stopped in 2004. There was now some indication of interest on the Iranian side of resuming it, although the modalities would have to be clear. The Iranians presented the discussions as each side discussing human rights issues in the other's area. Clearly, Riecken said, the EU would not entertain a discussion of Iranian allegations of human rights problems in the EU. The EU wants to see the human rights situation in Iran improve, but instead, it has gotten worse.

5. (C) Iraq -- The Commission has finished a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Iraq. External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner might present this to the council.

6. (C) Sudan/Congo -- There would be a discussion of Sudan during the lunch, with a focus on the decision of the AU's PSC to agree to a re-hatting of the AMIS mission. Riecken said there may be a discussion of an EU mission in Congo, but this depended on the Germans, who would lead such a mission.

7. (C) Lebanon -- Riecken said Liberia was not/not on the agenda. The final discussion would be on Lebanon. The EU has invited Lebanese FM Siniora to attend the coffee at the lunch to speak to ministers. This was a British and French proposal with a view toward supporting his position.

8. (C) Belarus -- There is some pressure to discuss Belarus, Riecken said, but most delegations think it would be "strange" to discuss the issue without having been able to see ODIHR's report, which comes out in Minsk at the same time as the GAERC meeting.

McCaw